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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000453

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. U.S.-Israel Relations

Key stories in the media:

The Jerusalem Post reported that both PM Ehud Olmert in Tokyo and FM Tzipi Livni in Jerusalem voiced skepticism publicly for the first

time on Tuesday about concluding a peace agreement with the PA by the end of 2008. Olmert said that while Israel desires to reach a deal and take a giant step forward to finally end the conflict, he is not sure that they will make it.

Ha'aretz and Yediot reported that Egyptian intelligence chief Omer Suleiman is scheduled to arrive in Israel next Tuesday for meetings with PM Ehud Olmert, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, and FM Tzipi Livni in an effort to reduce tension along the border between Egypt, Israel, and Gaza. Ha'aretz cited the doubts of Israeli security officials about the five-party plan -- involving Egypt, Israel, the Hamas government, the U.S., and the EU -- which calls for a reopening of the Rafah crossing with American support and guarantees, and the assistance of European monitors. The IDF and the Shin Bet are dubious that the monitors can be effective based on past experience. Israel Radio and other media reported that Israel's Ambassador to the U.S., Sallai Meridor told reporters in Washington that Egypt must stop the smuggling into Gaza, otherwise Israel would be forced to act. Meridor was also quoted as saying that PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas is ineffective and cannot act against Hamas.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Defense Minister Ehud Barak as saying on Tuesday that within two years, a fence will be built along 85 km of the border with Egypt.

Ha'aretz cited the results of a Dialogue poll showing that 64 percent of Israelis believe that the government must hold direct talks with the Hamas government in Gaza in order to reach a cease-fire and the release of Gilad Shalit. Less than one-third (28 percent) still opposes such talks. Electronic media quoted Palestinian sources as saying that five activists of Hamas's military and three other Palestinians were killed this morning when the bus in which they were riding along the coastal road in the Gaza Strip, west of Khan Yunis, was attacked in an air raid. Israel Radio reported that IDF Special Forces killed a Fatah/Tanzim activist in Nablus.

Democratic presidential candidate, Illinois Senator Barack Obama, was quoted as saying in an interview with Yediot that he is a friend of Israel, that he will bring to the White House his unshakeable commitment to Israel's security, that he is not a Muslim, and that he was sworn in on the Bible.

Leading media quoted IDF Intelligence head Amos Yadlin as saying before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Tuesday that trained terrorists and Al-Qaida operatives had entered Gaza through the recently breached border with Egypt. Yadlin was quoted as saying that a nuclear Iran is the "greatest threat to Israel," and Iran could possess these weapons by 2010. Yadlin also warned against retaliation by Hizbullah for the assassination of its top operative Imad Mughniyah, saying that past experience shows that many retaliatory terrorist attacks often come on the 40th day following such assassinations.

Israel Radio reported that today PM Olmert met with Japanese Emperor Akihito and that he will meet with Japan's FM Masahiko Koumura. Ha'aretz reported that on Tuesday Japanese PM Yasuo Fukuda, responding in writing to questions by the newspaper, criticized Israel for the slow rate of implementation of the Roadmap. Fukuda said that Iran's nuclear program must be met with a determined response. Yediot reported that PM Olmert will propose to Fukuda the creation of a joint working group including Japan, the U.S., and Israel to monitor North Korea's moves in the Middle East.

Israel Radio reported that UN officials John Holmes and Robert Serry told the UN Security Council that the situation along the border with Gaza endangers peace efforts.

Yediot and Israel Radio reported that French lawyers assisting Gilad Shalit's family are expected to meet with his captors in Gaza next week.

The Jerusalem Post reported that this week the Foreign Ministry named seasoned diplomat and spokesman Yigal Palmor as its spokesman, replacing Are Mekel, who has been promoted to deputy director-general of the ministry's Culture and Scientific Affairs division.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Intel as saying on Tuesday that it will convert a Jerusalem plant previously scheduled to be closed. It said that it received a tax break from the GOI.

Leading media reported that the Knesset is likely to pass a law today to censor the Internet. Sites with sexual or gambling content would be banned. Headlining "Good Morning, Pakistan," Maariv reported that Shas, Kadima, the Labor Party, and right-wing Knesset members will support the legislation.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote on his Internet site Gplanet: "The wise Palestinian population knows full well that the leaders it has chosen for itself are working against its true interests."

Former foreign minister Prof. Shlomo Ben-Ami wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Israel must ... change its strategic goal in Gaza from toppling Hamas to saving the Annapolis process."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Secrets of Success"

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote on his Internet site Gplanet (2/29): "The event of the 'largest human chain in the world' was attended only by a few thousand people, there was no real human chain, and those who did arrive did so in an organized manner, in buses. Hamas's expectation of tens of thousands and perhaps more, was disappointed. The Palestinians proved for the first time that they were not a human mass that docilely obeys any figure of power. We in Israel complain of a problem of leadership? Among the Palestinians, such leadership never existed, except for such abstract causes as the 'Palestinian problem,' whose meaning is something that no one quite understands to this day.... In all three cases [Gaza under Hamas, the West Bank under Abbas, and the Israeli Arabs], the wise Palestinian population knows full well that the leaders it has chosen for itself are working against its true interests. One generation after another, thousands of fatalities and hundreds of thousands of casualties have been sacrificed by this unfortunate population on behalf of its false leaders, but it continues to stand at attention every time it receives orders."

II. "Saving Annapolis"

Former foreign minister Prof. Shlomo Ben-Ami wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/27): "The Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, which were inaugurated by impressive speeches and good intentions three months ago at Annapolis, do not suffer from lack of ideas.... The problem is somewhere else. It stems from the dearth of leadership and the crumbling of the political system on the Palestinian side..... It would be a fantasy and self-delusion to assume that the Palestinian architects of the peace industry who were partners in the disappointing Oslo process ... could have gained necessary legitimacy to move the peace process forward.... Israel must ... change its strategic goal in Gaza from toppling Hamas to saving the Annapolis process. This requires not only a cease-fire with Hamas, but also a return to a Palestinian unity government that may grant the peace process the legitimacy it is lacking today. Without the revival of the Mecca Agreement, Hamas won't be able to ensure its rule in Gaza, and the PLO won't be able to put the peace process into practice."

12. U.S.-Israel Relations:

Summary:

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The news ... is not so much what Obama said, but the fact he said it, finally starting his own 'straight talk' dialogue with American Jewry."

Block Quotes:

"Obama's New 'Straight Talk' on Israel"

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/27): "Support for Israel is much more comfortably measured by those who care most about it by a record of consistency built over decades, rather than in a scant few years. It is this circumstance that has created uncertainty among some sectors of American Jewry (and in official Israeli circles as well) regarding Obama -- not an imaginary past that supposedly had him trained in an Indonesian madras to be an Islamic Manchurian candidate, but the lack of a real past when it comes to Middle East affairs, at least in comparison to the likes of Hillary Clinton and John McCain. .. But there is little in Obama's comments that counts as either surprising or any real deviation from his previous stands. What's more, he took pains to distance himself from views on Israel expressed by some of his associates deemed less acceptable to the Jewish community, including his occasional foreign policy adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, and his Chicago pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright. The news here is not so much what Obama said, but the fact he said it, finally starting his own 'straight talk' dialogue with American Jewry. Perhaps this can be taken as another sign that he is now looking beyond the primaries to a campaign against McCain, where U.S. policy on Israel will surely be more of a factor than it has been in his battle against Clinton."

JONES